



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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August 28, 2016

Old Calendar Dormition

St. Anna the Prophetess (1st C)

St. Moses the Black of Egypt (375)

St. Job of Pochaev (1651)



- ☞ **Inquirer's Class Wednesday, August 31, 6:30pm**
- ☞ **Father Alex will be away next weekend**
- ☞ **Annual Parish Meeting, Sunday, September 18**

No Progress without Struggle

† "In order to cast out a passion, one should not justify himself; but, instead, humble himself. If, for example, one says: *'I have no love within my nature, but the other person does,'* and makes no effort to acquire this love, how can he ever make progress? There can be no progress without struggle. Haven't you read in the Patristic writings of how many weaknesses some of the Fathers had, and of what great spiritual heights they attained? They surpassed others who had a great many virtues. Take, for example, Abba Moses the Ethiopian — a notorious criminal who attained great heights of spirituality! The things the Grace of God does!"

- St. Paisios of Mt. Athos

You have received a greater power...

† "For now the devil fiercely assails us; for the greater the gift, so much greater will be the assault against us: for the devil, even if seeing one enter Paradise cannot bear it, tell me how can he endure to see so many in heaven? You have aroused this fierce beast but do not fear! You have received a greater power, a sharper sword. Pierce the serpent with it. God suffers the demon to rage against you, that you may learn by trial the force of your own strength."

"And as when a very good trainer of the gymnasium accepts some weak and wretched athlete, and when he has massaged him, taught him, and strengthened his body, he does not allow him to remain idle, but bids him to enter the contests, so as to learn by experience what strength he has acquired. So has Christ also done. He could have removed the enemy from our midst, but that you may learn the superiority of His grace, and the greatness of spiritual strength you have received in your baptism, he allows the enemy to attack you, giving you at the same time the opportunity to gain for yourself many victories."

St. John the Chrysostom

One More on Marriage:

† In most cultures, Christian or not, the couple are seeking the blessing of the rest of the community to set up as a family, have children, take their places among the "responsible adults" of the community. This is important to the whole community as it determines who will rear the next generation. So the community has a right to say who can be married and how it is done. In our case, the community is the Church. Being married in the church building expresses their intention that they are seeking the blessing of the Church and intend their marriage and family to be in the context of the Church. But to be married on a beach leaves all that behind.

- Fr. Paul Yerger, Jackson, MS

✠ **VENERABLE MOSES THE BLACK** – Remembered August 28

Moses was an Ethiopian by birth and by profession, at first, a robber and leader of a band of robbers and, after that, a penitent and great ascetic. As the slave of a master, Moses escaped and joined the robbers. Because of his great physical strength and arrogance, the robbers chose him as their leader. Suddenly, Moses was overcome with pangs of conscience and repentance for the misdeeds which he had committed. He left the group, entered a monastery in Egypt and gave himself completely in obedience to his spiritual father and to the monastic rule. He benefited much from the teachings of Saints Macarios, Arsenios and Isidore. Later, he withdrew to solitude in a cell where he dedicated himself completely to physical labor, prayer, vigils and Godly-thoughts. Tormented by the demon of fornication, Moses confessed to Isidore, his spiritual father, and from him, received counsel to fast even more and never to eat to full satisfaction. When even this did not help he, at the counsel of the elder, began to keep vigil at night and to pray standing; after that, he began the practice of bringing water to the elderly monks from a distant well all night long. After six years of terrible struggles, St. Isidore finally miraculously healed him of fornicating thoughts, fantasies and dreams brought about on him by demons.

St. Moses was ordained a priest in old age. He founded his own monastery and had seventy-five disciples and lived in this life for seventy-five years. He foresaw his death and, one day, he told his disciples to flee for the barbarians were going to attack the monastery. When the disciples also urged him to flee with them, Moses said that he must die by violence for, at one time, he himself committed violence and, according to the words: "For all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (St. Matthew 26:52). He remained there with six brethren and the barbarians came and slew them. One of the brethren, hidden in the vicinity, beheld and saw seven shining wreaths as they descended upon the seven martyrs.

REFLECTION... on Avoiding Praise

A true Christian avoids the praise of men; not only avoids, but has a true fear of it. St. Sava of Pskov (Aug. 28) left the office of abbot, the monastery and the good brotherhood of the monastery and fled to a desolate place to escape the praise of men, for praise of men robs our heart.

A devout prince, upon hearing of the mortification of **St. Moses the Ethiopian**, went with his retinue into the desert to see him. Informed that the prince was coming to his monastery, Moses quickly ran out and began to flee and to hide somewhere, but he unexpectedly encountered the high-ranking visitors. "Where is the cell of Abba Moses?" the servants of the prince asked not suspecting that this was Moses himself. Moses opened his mouth and said: "What do you want him for? He is an ignorant old man, a liar and completely impure in life." Hearing this, the visitors were astonished and continued on. When they arrived at the cell of Moses, they inquired about the Elder and the monks said that he was not there. Then they began to relate what a monk on the road had said about Moses. The monks were saddened and asked them: "How did he look, this old man, who spoke to you mocking words about this holy man?" And when they said that he was very dark in the face, tall and in a miserable garment; the monks cried out loudly: "but that was indeed Abba Moses!" By this incident, the prince benefited greatly spiritually and rejoicedly returned to his home.

✠ **VENERABLE THEODORA OF THESSALONICA** (Aug. 28)

As the wife of a wealthy and devout man, they lived on the Greek island of Aegina. But when the Arabs menaced Aegina, they settled in Thessalonica. There they gave up their one and only daughter to a convent who, in monasticism, received the name of Theopista. Soon after, Theodora's husband died and she also became a nun. She was a great ascetic. She often heard angelic singing and often spoke to the sisters: "Do you not hear how beautifully the angels sing in the Heavenly sanctuary?" She died at the age of seventy-five in the year 879 A.D. From her relics flowed healing myrrh by which many were healed.

God's Providence ~

That we must not be overly inquisitive, and wait for the final outcome of things

St. John Chrysostom drives home our need to avoid being inquisitive regarding God's incomprehensible providence, and to be patient — realizing that the final outcome of His providence may not be revealed to us until we depart this temporal life.

“Above all, we must not be overly inquisitive — either at the outset or afterwards. But if you are curious and inquisitive, wait for the final outcome and see how things turn out. And do not be thrown into confusion, do not be troubled at the start. When an inexperienced man first sees a goldsmith melting gold and mixing it with ashes and chaff - if he does not wait till the end - he will think that the gold is ruined... Therefore, you too, O man, especially do not be inquisitive about the common Master of us all. But if you are so contentious and daring as to rage with such madness, then wait for the final outcome of events.”

“If the farmer waits the whole winter, not considering what the wheat is undergoing during the time of frost, but the benefit he will get from it, much more, before Him Who cultivates the whole world, as well as our souls, is it fitting for you to wait the final outcome. But by outcome I do not mean only the outcome in the present life - for often it will be here, as well - but also that in the life to come. God's economy is directed towards a single end in each of these lives: our salvation and good repute. Even if it is divided in two with regards to time, it is united with regards to objective. Just as, at first, it is Winter and then it is Spring, and the passage of season has a single goal - the ripening of the fruit - so it is with our affairs.”

“Therefore, when you see the Church scattered, undergoing the utmost sufferings, its prominent members attacked and flogged, its leader carried afar off, consider not only these things, but also the things that will result from them: the rewards, the compensations, the prizes, the awards. *‘He that endureth to the end shall be saved,’* says the Lord [Matthew 10:22]. In the time of the Old Covenant, when the teaching on the resurrection was not yet well known, both things came to pass in the present life. But in the time of the New Covenant, this is not always so. There are, rather, instances where there are painful things here in this life, and the good things await our departure from here.”

“Nevertheless, since under the Old Covenant the good things of life were coming to them in the present life, especially admirable are they who did not enjoy these good things, since without clearly knowing the teaching on the resurrection, and seeing events that were contrary to the promise of God, they were not scandalized, they were not thrown into confusion, they were not troubled. Rather, they submitted themselves to God's incomprehensible providence — not being scandalized by adverse events. Knowing the resourcefulness and inventiveness of His wisdom, they waited for the end. Everything, moreover, that was done to them before the end, they endured with thankfulness. And they continued to glorify God, Who allowed these things to take place.”

Wisdom from Elder Thaddeus of Serbia:

We must be prepared to accept the will of God. The Lord permits all sorts of things to happen to us contrary to our will, for if we always have it our way, we will not be prepared for the Kingdom of Heaven. Neither heaven nor earth will receive those who are self-willed. God has a Divine plan for each one of us, and we must submit to His plan. We must accept life as it is given to us, without asking, "Why me?" We must know that nothing on earth or in heaven ever happens without the will of God or His permission. We must not become too engrossed with our hardships but concentrate on preserving our inner peace. Even when we are praying for something, we are trying to force our will instead of accepting God's. All hardships and sorrows that God sends us are necessary for us, but we do not understand this when we are young. When we are older, then we understand that this is the way God shows His love for us.

I have had many falls, sorrows, and travails throughout my life, but it could not have been otherwise. The Holy Fathers say, "How will we know that God truly loves us, if He does not take us through much suffering and sorrow?"

There are times when people become depressed and despondent, which is a type of pride in its own way. If a person loves the things of this world, this will invariably lead to despondency, for he will not find God in them. Each human being feels lonely at times, even when he is among people, until the moment he becomes free from the things of this world. At that point, God comes to comfort him. The soul feels lonesome because the power of Grace diminishes in it due to its interest in the things of this world. One cannot go both ways! Unless it is humbled, the soul cannot receive the fitness of God's Grace, for if it received Grace in its proud state it would surely result in great evil, as was the case with the fallen angels.

Our life on earth is like an epitimia (penance). Don't be surprised that bad things happen all the time.

I always long to return to the state of Grace that I had as a novice, and I cannot. My efforts are sincere; I try, but a problem arises or a thought assails me, and then I end up beset with worries. However, when the Lord sees our efforts, He does not despise us. One day He will give us the strength to free ourselves from our cares. We must leave all our cares to the Lord, leave our lives and the lives of our loved ones to the Lord, and all will be well.

The Jesus Prayer is a work common to the angels and to men. With this prayer, men quickly approach the life of the Angels.

The Prayer is the source of all good deeds and virtues, and drives far away from man the dark passions. In a short time, it makes man worthy to obtain the grace of the Holy Spirit. Obtain it, and before you die, you will obtain an angelic soul. The Prayer is divine rejoicing.

There is no other spiritual weapon that can so efficiently hinder the demons. It burns them like fire burns the brush.

-St. Paisios Velichkovsky (18th C)

Let Your Yea Be Yea and Your Nay Be Nay

There are questions which we cannot avoid and from which we cannot hide in a fog of rhetorical questions and vague allusions. Basically, there is the question of whether single-sex cohabitation is a sin which separates people from the Church, or not.

Sergey Khudiev | 05 July 2011, Pravmir.com

A situation where what is completely acceptable to secular society, but is seen by the Church as a sin is not unusual. An abortionist may be a respectable citizen, working in a perfectly legal occupation, paying his taxes on time, giving money to charity, a courteous and charming man. But how do we deal with the abortionist who comes and knocks on the parish door, seeking Christ? According to the rules of repentance, do we exhort him to abandon his previous occupation? Of course, we do! Pastoral care does not at all consist of testifying to the world that his actions are good.

How do we deal with someone who is involved in an unnatural cohabitation? Do we exhort him to abandon such a lifestyle? Since Apostolic times the Church has done exactly this.

'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6: 9-11).

'Pastoral care' is different from a session of psychotherapy or a friendly pat on the shoulder, in that a priest acts in the name of the Church of Christ, announcing Her Truth and forgiving sins by the power given him by Christ in the Church. Someone who openly breaks with Church Tradition in this matter can be anyone you want – a friend, a psychotherapist, a coach, but never a pastor.

It is exactly the same as a doctor who, not wishing to upset his alcoholic patients, reassures them 'with love' that they can accept his treatment and continue to drink. In fact, he cannot give them any real help and deserves to be called a quack, not a doctor.

There are questions which we cannot avoid and from which we cannot hide in a fog of rhetorical questions and vague allusions. Basically, there is the question of whether single-sex cohabitation is a sin which separates people from the Church, or not.

If we answer this question with a yes, as the Church has always answered it, then we must not hide this from those on the outside. We must witness to this with tact and love, but we should leave nothing unclear or ambiguous. If this is not a sin, then let us acknowledge the inescapable conclusion – that the Orthodox Church has been deluding people on a question which is vital for their salvation.

Still worse, to say that this is a sin before God (if God did actually have nothing against it) means that the Church has all this time been lying about God. Let us be consistent in our beliefs; if our demand for repentance and an end to cohabitation of a single-sex couple is wrong, then the Church – the Apostles, the Fathers, the Councils, anyone who has ever as much broached the subject – has been teaching an untruth. Such a viewpoint is possible and I think that any sincerely erring person would accept this.

But if he is sincere, then he will not start claiming 'pastoral care' from the Church. How can a community, which all this time has been teaching an untruth about God, be a source of spiritual guidance? The acknowledgement that in fact all this time we have been lying about God, that we have been deceiving you as regards what is indispensable for salvation, all this time we have been preaching such a monstrous injustice, refusing to

recognize single-sex cohabitation as legitimate marriage, makes any claim to spiritual guidance sound completely ridiculous. If you have been lying for two long millennia and were going on to continue lying, if purely external pressure had not forced you to go away – then what spiritual guidance can we seek from you now? It is no coincidence that modernist communities are losing parishioners at breakneck speed, they have deprived themselves of any possible claim to be teaching the truth.

This was Sodom and Gomorrah



However, if the Church was right in everything all this time, and this is a matter on which all Christians, despite all their internal disagreements, have always agreed on, then we should not be afraid to tell the truth with love.

Nevertheless, we should address ourselves to one objection which is often encountered. This is that a homosexual 'orientation' is genetically determined and, as it would seem, this has been established by contemporary science, which Christians in earlier ages did not know about. Therefore, we must review our concepts according to new discoveries about the world and human nature.

There are three problems with this argument. First of all, if it were true and science could determine that there is nothing wrong with homosexual behavior, then this would not simply require an adjustment to the Church's teaching, but the recognition that our faith in the Church in general is illogical. In such a case, for two thousand years, let us remember, the Church, which is guided by the Holy Spirit, as it is affirmed, has unanimously, and in Councils, been teaching an untruth. If that is so, then it would be more honest to consign the Church to a museum than to adjust Her. Such things cannot be repaired.

However, and we note this as the second problem, this argument comes from a sort of substitution. The point is that just because certain behavior is, supposedly, genetically determined, that does not make it morally acceptable.

For example, imagine that a whole series of researchers suggests that a so-called anti-social personal disorder, in which someone demonstrates a stubborn inability to respect moral and legal social standards, is of a genetic nature. Does this mean that such behavior in people who suffer from this disorder is morally acceptable? No, even the hardest supporters of 'the genetic theory' do not believe this. Even in the eighteenth century David Hume pointed out the insuperable difference between 'being' and 'having to'. Science can establish certain facts about the world, but this does not, and in principle cannot, affect our values.

If science, for instance, establishes that 'men are inclined to polygamy', this does not mean that 'being a polygamist is morally acceptable'. We determine the moral acceptability (or moral unacceptability) of polygamy on the basis of our values, which in any case are to be found at a completely different level from scientific facts.

And finally – and perhaps we should have started by this – science has not established anything like the genetic determinism of homosexuality. This may sound unexpected; the thesis that homosexuality is genetically determined 'has been established by science' is proclaimed with such certainty, such pressure, such contempt towards all those who doubt it, as if they were retarded, stupid and ignorant, that only very rarely do people ask for proof of it.

However, we do have data, acquired for instance from research on identical twins, which shows that people with an identical genetic make-up can have a completely different 'sexual orientation'. Even such a pro-homosexual group as the American Psychological Association (APA) refrains from asserting 'the biological determinism' of homosexuality, acknowledging that 'there is no consensus among scholars regarding the reasons which lead to the development of one or another orientation'.

When you are told that homosexuals 'were born like that', you are dealing with an ideological myth, not with a scientifically established truth. This myth looks even more vulnerable in the light of the plain fact that there are a huge numbers of examples where people have changed their sexual preferences one way or the other.

Therefore, let us turn to the definition of marriage which the Lord gave us: 'But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more two, but one flesh' (Mk.10: 6-8).

Yes, we will have serious disagreements with the world, but there always have been and always will be. Yes, the liberal press will revile us and slander us in all sorts of ways – so what, we shall survive. But be honest – if the bi-millennial teaching of the Church is false, then reject it at once. But if it is true, then confess it openly.

~ Translated from Russian by Fr. Andrew Phillips

This and That

When all is said and done, our salvation will be accomplished by the same grace that makes the grass grow and the sun to shine. That it does not immediately transform us into gods at this moment is simply the work of our own resistance to grace. St. Symeon the New Theologian (I think it was, though it could have been someone else) said, "If a man so willed it, he could be deified in a day." This, of course, would not be because of the force of the will, but through the super abundance of grace that is available to us at every moment.

The notion, I think, of "no grace outside the Church," is a very Westernized take on things, and not at all consonant with the better thought within the Fathers. It doesn't even make sense. It would be tantamount to saying, "There is no existence outside the Church."

The latter statement is probably true, though. Khomiakov held that the Church came into existence when God said, "Let there be light!" And since it is the stated purpose of God to gather all things together in one in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1), then it is clear that ultimately, all things will be manifest as the Church - for that is what "One in Christ Jesus" looks like.

I like to say that I was born Orthodox, but that I lived in schism with myself for 45 years. And I think that's an accurate way to think. There is only "outside" the Church because there are some who do not yet know that they are "inside" the Church. Of course, they need to be baptized. But as Fr. Schmemmann said of the Sacraments, they do not make something to be what it is not, but reveal it to be what it is. A human being, in Baptism, becomes what they were created to be - truly human.

Fr. Stephen Freeman

The churches, guided by their pastors, have assimilated to the world. In the absence of robustly independent traditions of life and thought that they habitually put first, they, too, go with the flow and align themselves with wealth and power. Pope Francis, for example, talks about a poor Church for the poor, but the effect is to call for greater transnational administrative control of social life. He is happy to hobnob with global movers and shakers, who in turn are happy to receive him as a junior partner in support of the world order of transnational bureaucracy and crony capitalism they are creating. The effect is a would-be powerful Church for the powerful...

Marriage and family have lost definition. Children are brought up by peer groups, social media, pop culture, and professional custodians. Education is either vocational or propagandistic, and it is often disconnected from tradition and reality. Employment is precarious, and employers increasingly totalitarian. And the electronic media pervade the whole of life, replacing stable face-to-face relationships with networks of shifting connections and images...

Political correctness is both integral to the progressive project of social reconstruction and completely at odds with natural ways of life and thought.

– James Kalb, *Chronicles*

"On my journey into Orthodoxy by way of learning about the history of the Christianity, I began to see a trend among those who introduced heresy into the Church: they often could not deal with the paradoxes, contradictions, and seeming impossibilities within Christianity (The Trinity, Christology, Theotokos, etc.) and thus sought to modify doctrine and belief into something more "reasonable". Seeing this trend also revealed to me how I, too, fall into the same error of making my own neat and tidy form of Christianity for myself. Lord have mercy on me, a reasoning sinner!

Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

- Paddy, internet comment

Laws of Probability Rule Out Darwin's Primordial-Soup Recipe

Charley Reese, October 3, 1999, Orlando Sentinel

"If there is no God, human life is not sacred, not even valuable. And if human life has no particular value, then a concept such as human rights becomes meaningless."

To put it plainly, Darwin's theory of the origin of life and its evolution is bunk. Scientific evidence points to intelligent design, a fact inconsistent with Darwinism and perfectly consistent with religion.

Evolution is just part of the secular world's basic dogma, which is why evolutionists react so hysterically and maliciously when the flaws of the theory are exposed. The whole poisonous stew of modern philosophy, which began in the 19th century and flowered in the 20th century in the form of socialism and its offshoots -- Nazism, fascism, communism and materialism -- rests on the basic premise that there is no God.

Many people, including some Christians, have not realized the momentous import of that issue. If there is no God, human life is not sacred, not even valuable. And if human life has no particular value, then a concept such as human rights becomes meaningless. And killing people for whatever reason is also quite acceptable. This is what has produced what Pope John Paul II has called the culture of death.

A new book, *The Lost Literature of Socialism* by George Watson (Cambridge: the Lutterworth Press), shows both the elitist and murderous aspects of socialism, the umbrella philosophy of modernity. "In the European century that began the 1840s," he writes, "from Engels' article of 1849 down to the death of Hitler, everyone who advocated genocide called himself a socialist, and no exception has been found."

Darwin, like Ptolemy the Greek astronomer whose Earth-in-the-center-of-the-universe theory was accepted fact for centuries, may have made some reasonable suppositions, given the limits of knowledge in his day. However, what has undone his theory has not been preachers but honest scientists.

The fossil record not only does not support Darwin, it contradicts him. It shows abrupt appearance of species that hang around with relatively few changes and then disappear.

The laws of probability rule out his by-chance creation of life in the primordial soup. Astronomer Fred Hoyle put it quite elegantly: The probability is the same as it is for a tornado moving through a junkyard to create a Boeing 747 from random tossing about of the debris.

Finally, and most conclusively, as he himself foresaw, the discovery that living organisms are "irreducibly complex" drives the wooden stake through his theory. As one biochemist has put it, the only logical inferences to be drawn point toward intelligent design.

But don't expect the Darwinians to accept defeat graciously or even admit it. Too much is at stake, and they will fight tenaciously. At least now, however, they will have to rely on polemics and semantic tricks, not on science. They will have their scientists all right, but scientist, like journalist or bricklayer, refers to a vocation not to any sort of special human being. A scientist, like any other human, can be evil or dishonest or a Marxist or a Nazi in addition to being a scientist. Just remember that once you reject God, you reject the value and dignity of your own life. As many a survivor of this miserable (20th) century's horrors can tell you...